

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 02956 291223Z

44

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-07 CIAE-00 DODE-00 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 AID-20 IGA-02 OMB-01 TRSE-00

MC-02 EB-11 DRC-01 /160 W

----- 112763

R 291055Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 280

CONFIDENTIAL COLOMBO 2956

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, BEXP, ETRN, CE, MV

SUBJ: AVAILABILITY OF SURPLUS US MILITARY CONVAIR 440

AIRCRAFT FOR MALDIVES

REF STATE 230991

1. GOM HAS DECIDED TO FORM COMMERCIAL AIRLINE TO SUPPORT ITS EXPANDING TOURIST TRADE. SRI LANKA AIR FORCE (SLAF) HAS UP TO NOW BEEN RELIABLE AS CHARTER AIRLINE TO FERRY TOURISTS FROM COLOMBO TO MALE BUT LIMITED IN SPACE. GOM CONSIDERS AIR CEYLON HAS BEEN TOTALLY UNRELIABLE. WITH APPROVAL OF PM BANDARANAIKE, AIR COMMODORE MENDIS, SLAF COMMANDER, HAS BEEN APPOINTED DIRECTOR AND ADVISER TO MALDIVIAN AIRLINE. MENDIS WANTS TO PURCHASE TWO CONVAIR 440 AIRCRAFT FOR MALDIVIAN AIRLINE WHICH WILL BE MANNED AND MAINTAINED BY SLAF. MENDIS TELLS US HE HAS ALREADY RECEIVED SEVERAL COMMERCIAL TENDERS INCLUDING "VERY GOOD OFFER" FROM UK FIRM. HE WANTS TO MAKE PURCHASE SOON TO GET MALDIVIAN AIRLINE STARTED BY EARLY 1974.

2. GOM UNDERSECRETARY FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DISCUSSED VENTURE WITH DATT IN MALE NOV 27 AND STATED DIPLOMATIC NOTE WILL BE DELIVERED TO EMBASSY IN NEXT FEW DAYS ASKING FOR ASSISTANCE FROM USG FOR ACQUISITION OF THESE AIRCRAFT. ACCORDING TO CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 02956 291223Z

UNDERSECRETARY, GOM ALSO WANTS TO HAVE AIRLINE IN OPERATION

BY EARLY 1974.

3. ASSUMING PROJECTED AIRLINE OPERATION IS SUCCESSFUL
BECAUSE OF CURRENT SUCCESS AND EXPANSION OF MALDIVIAN TOURIST
INDUSTRY, MENDIS'S BIAS TOWARD US AIRCRAFT COULD PROVIDE
ADVANTAGE IN PROMOTING US SALES. EXCELLENT INFORMAL USAF
ASSISTANCE EARLY THIS YEAR IN SLAF PURCHASE OF CONVAIR 440 HAS
BEEN A REAL PLUS IN OUR RELATIONS. SINCE GOM LOOKS TO
MENDIS, HIS PREFERENCE WILL LIKELY CONTROL INITIAL PURCHASES.
BECAUSE SLAF HAS ONE CONVAIR 440, MENDIS WANTS TWO FOR GOM
IN ORDER CONSOLIDATE TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS.

4. WE BELIEVE IT WILL BE IN US INTEREST, BOTH COMMERCIALLY
AND POLITICALLY, TO DEVELOP SALE OF CONVAIRS TO EXTENT
POSSIBLE. IF GOM ASKS US FOR ASSISTANCE IN PURCHASE, AS THEY
APPARENTLY ARE GOPCG TO DO, REQUEST GUIDANCE ON AVAILABILITY
OF SUCH HELP. BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE, WE BELIEVE GOM PROB-
ABLY MEANS "GIFT" WHEN IT ASKS FOR ASSISTANCE.

VAN HOLLEN

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NNN

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